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Chairman: Mr. Galuška ..... (Czech Republic)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 116: Human rights questions (*continued*)

(b) Human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms (*continued*) (A/54/93, A/54/137, A/54/216, A/54/222 and Add. 1, A/54/303, A/54/319, A/54/336, A/54/353, A/54/360, A/54/386, A/54/399 and Add. 1, A/54/401, A/54/439 and A/54/491)

(c) Human rights situations and reports of special rapporteurs and representatives (*continued*) (A/54/188, A/54/302, A/54/330-S/1999/958, A/54/331-S/1999/959, A/54/359, A/54/361, A/54/365, A/54/366, A/54/387, A/54/396-S/1999/1000, A/54/409, A/54/422, A/54/440, A/54/465, A/54/466, A/54/467, A/54/482, A/54/493 and A/54/499; A/C.3/54/3 and A/C.3/54/4)

(d) Comprehensive implementation of and follow-up to the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (*continued*)

(e) Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (*continued*) (A/54/36, Suppl. No. 36)

1. **Mr. Hamdoon** (Iraq) said that in his interim report (A/54/466), the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the situation of human rights in Iraq took the view that the Iraqi Government was responsible for non-respect of the right to food and health care, without taking into account the sanctions imposed against Iraq; the reports of various non-governmental organizations, and particularly the most recent report of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), had drawn attention to the damaging effects of the sanctions.

2. The report of the second panel established in implementation of the note by the President of the Security Council dated 30 January 1999 (S/1999/100) to assess the current humanitarian situation in Iraq, and chaired by Mr. Amorim, described an increase in juvenile delinquency, begging and prostitution in Iraq, anxiety about the future and lack of motivation, a rising sense of isolation bred by absence of contact with the outside world, and disruption of family life. While the World Health Organization (WHO) had drawn attention to the extreme isolation of the Iraqi scientific community and its outdated expertise, UNICEF had stressed that a whole generation of Iraqis was disconnected from the rest of the world and, according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), it was children between 5 and 15 years of age who were the most affected.

3. The UNICEF report dated 12 August 1999 affirmed that the death of 500,000 Iraqi children under the age of five between 1991 and 1998 could have been avoided if Iraq had not had to endure the sanctions imposed on it. Moreover, radiation released from the depleted uranium weapons used by the United States of America and the United Kingdom in 1991 had caused the death of over 50,000 children and its effects were continuing to be felt in subsequent generations.

4. Many humanitarian aid contracts had been suspended under false pretexts, preventing, for example the import of high-protein biscuits and therapeutic milk for children.

5. In reporting grave violations of civil and political rights in Iraq which could not be verified, the Special Rapporteur was clearly seeking to justify his request for the stationing of human rights monitors in Iraq.

6. The question of missing persons of Kuwaiti nationality was a matter for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and did not fall within the mandate of the Special Rapporteur. The problem of missing persons was a humanitarian problem, and its solution was in Iraq's interest. Over 1,000 persons had disappeared in Iraq following the actions by the United States of America and the United Kingdom. Yet those two countries, which were committing aggression against Iraq on a daily basis and had not experienced the disappearance of a single national in Iraqi territory, seemed to have raised the problem of missing persons for purely political reasons.

7. When the Special Rapporteur expressed regret that Iraq was not cooperating with the human rights mechanisms established by the United Nations, he was ignoring the cooperation offered by the Iraqi Government to the various special rapporteurs in the regular correspondence it maintained with them. Iraq was determined to ensure the implementation of the human rights instruments to which it was a party and, in June 2000, would consider the next report on combatting all forms of discrimination against women. Iraq rejected the idea of the stationing of human rights monitors in its country, however, because that would constitute gross interference in its internal affairs.

8. Iraq found it regrettable that the Special Rapporteur was adhering to positions which were far from impartial and which undermined the reputation of the Iraqi Government and recalled that in its resolution 53/149, the General Assembly had urged special rapporteurs to respect the

principles of non-selectivity, impartiality and objectivity. The distortion of facts and of the human rights situation in Iraq clearly illustrated the way in which double standards could be applied in order to achieve certain political objectives.

9. **Mr. Amor** (Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the question of the elimination of all forms of intolerance and of discrimination based on religion or belief), introducing his fifth interim report on the elimination of all forms of intolerance and of discrimination based on religion or belief (A/54/386), said that, since drawing up the report to the fifty-fifth session of the Commission on Human Rights, he had sent 66 communications to 49 States, and had received replies from a total of 25 States, including 10 after the completion of the report. In addition, he had sent 26 communications to 19 States after the report had been completed. He stressed that those communications were not exhaustive and that the report referred to only a few States.

10. He had sent an urgent appeal to Iraq concerning the assassination of Ayatollah Mohammad Sadeck al-Sadr and his two sons. Iraq, in its reply, had affirmed its commitment to guaranteeing the freedom and security of the national and religious symbols of Iraq's various communities and religions and had indicated that it would transmit the results of the investigation that was under way.

11. He had also addressed an urgent appeal to the Islamic Republic of Iran about the arrest of 13 members of the Jewish community, including rabbis and religious teachers, in the cities of Shiraz and Isfahan. The Government replied that the suspects were accused of spying for Israel and the United States of America, that they included both Christians and Muslims and that the investigation and arrest had taken place for reasons of national security, not religious beliefs.

12. With regard to *in situ* visits, he said that he would be visiting Turkey in December 1999 and Bangladesh in 2000, but had yet to receive replies to his requests for permission to visit Israel and the Russian Federation, among others. His visit to the Holy See in September 1999 had been part of the process of establishing a dialogue with religious communities and encouraging inter-religious dialogue as a means of preventing intolerance and discrimination.

13. He also reported on initiatives to promote a culture of tolerance and non-discrimination in the field of education, particularly at the primary and secondary levels, and on the review of national legislation on freedom of religion and belief. The questions of racism and defamation of religions also came within his mandate, taking into account the guidelines provided by the Commission on Human Rights.

14. He believed that it would be appropriate to change the title of his mandate to "Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief". The use of the term "intolerance" aroused antagonism in some circles and did not help to promote a dialogue. He noted that the Commission on Human Rights had decided to consider changing the title at its fifty-sixth session.

15. In order to strengthen special procedures as requested by the World Conference on Human Rights, the independence of special rapporteurs needed fuller protection and more resources needed to be made available to them. A further effort should also be made to streamline and coordinate their activities, without, however, compromising their freedom of action and specific responsibilities.

16. Increased attention should be paid to the situation of women within the context of religion, and an international strategy should be adopted for promoting a human rights culture.

17. The issue of sects also needed to be examined dispassionately and impartially, to ensure that freedom of religion and belief was not diverted from its primary goal.

18. States should mark the twentieth anniversary of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief by taking stock of initiatives in that area and drawing up a plan of action, based on dialogue and education, for the prevention of intolerance and discrimination.

19. **Mr. Cordeiro** (Angola) said that his delegation could not entirely support the content of the Special Rapporteur's report since it had strong reservations as to the accuracy of some of the report's finding and the reliability of some of the sources used in its drafting.

20. As a full-fledged democracy, Angola was committed to protecting and promoting all the rights of its citizens. The Angolan Constitution provided for the separation of State and religion and for respect and protection by the State of all religious groups and creeds.

21. Angola was currently a host to dozens of different religions with millions of followers, including Catholics, Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslims, and places of worship were protected by law.

22. About 90 per cent of the Angolan population were Christians, and Christian institutions continued to play a very important role, especially in the social sphere, from providing assistance to the most disadvantaged members of society to contributing actively to the restoration of peace and to national reconciliation.

23. His Government enjoyed a good relationship with the religious institutions established in Angola and had never been accused any of those institutions of violating the physical integrity or well-being of their members, contrary to the allegations contained in one of the Special Rapporteur's recent reports.

24. His delegation rejected those allegations and challenged that they be supported by evidence, and reiterated the Government's attachment to the international norms enshrined in the human rights instruments to which Angola was a signatory.

25. **Ms. Mesdoua** (Algeria) asked for clarification as to the proposed change in the title of the Special Rapporteur's mandate, as she did not understand the reasons for such a change. She believed that in a world where religious intolerance was becoming increasingly widespread and religious extremism threatened the protection and promotion of fundamental rights, particularly women's rights, the Special Rapporteur's mandate as currently worded was especially apt.

26. **Mr. Rytovuori** (Finland), speaking on behalf of the European Union, wondered what urgent measures should be taken to combat the religious extremism and to promote religious tolerance described by the Special Rapporteur in his report. Given the interaction between religious intolerance and racism, he also wondered what form the cooperation between the Special Rapporteur and the other parties involved in the preparatory process for the World Conference against Racism would take.

27. **Mr. Win** (Myanmar) said that while, thanks to the mechanism of special rapporteurs, the international community had been able to more effectively monitor and, in some cases, prevent violations of human rights in different parts of the world, the principles and procedures followed by the various special rapporteurs also revealed how effectively it contributed to promoting and protecting human rights. That mechanism must not be abused in order to further narrow political interests. The Special Rapporteur should ascertain the credibility and reliability of his sources of information to ensure that unfounded allegations did not find their way into reports and negatively affect a country's image. In his report (A/54/386), the Special Rapporteur seemed to imply that the Government of Myanmar was pursuing a policy of intolerance and discrimination against minorities and their religious beliefs, which had no basis in reality. The Government of Myanmar was firmly opposed to any act of religious intolerance and discrimination and had, in recent years, sought to promote harmonious relations between the various religions in the country. Indeed, although 90 per cent of the population were followers of Theravada Buddhism, the Ministry of Religious Affairs facilitated the pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj) of a significant number of Muslims, as well as the participation of archbishops and bishops in international religious conferences and meetings. Members of all faiths sought to respect other religious beliefs and contribute to the harmony which was characteristic of the civilization of Myanmar and which was furthered by the Government. The latter had taken all necessary steps in that regard, including maintaining continuous contacts with religious leaders, who received financial and material assistance. Furthermore, any allegations of intolerance or persecution could only be the work of dissidents abroad acting for political purposes.

28. The allegation of repression of a small Christian community in the Chin State referred to in the report was a deliberate exaggeration and misrepresentation of a trivial misunderstanding over the construction of a place of worship which had been resolved amicably; it in no way indicated any widespread manifestation of religious intolerance or discrimination.

29. **Mr. Amor** (Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the elimination of all forms of religious intolerance and of discrimination based on religion or belief), replying to the representative of Angola, said that the qualities expected in a special rapporteur were objectivity and honesty. The large amount of information which a special rapporteur received on all countries led him neither to judge nor to condemn. Such information constituted allegations about which he informed the State and requested it to confirm or deny the information and provide comments. The sources of information, which were many and varied, were of differing degrees of credibility. In the south of Angola, there were few active or credible non-governmental organizations. Information was thus sometimes submitted by non-governmental organizations based in other regions. Although often accurate, such information did not always supply the required details, hence the importance of obtaining additional information from States. Information was collected with the utmost care.

30. Replying to the representative of Algeria, he said that the terms, which were inappropriate in his view, of his initial mandate concerned intolerance and discrimination on grounds of religion or belief. Intolerance, which existed everywhere, tended to be dealt with on a daily basis, which did not allow root causes to be addressed. The Commission on Human Rights and the General Assembly had thus quickly recognized the need to prevent intolerance and discrimination by stressing dialogue between and within religions, with particular emphasis on education. Legally,

the mandate of the Special Rapporteur therefore dealt with both the question of intolerance as well as its prevention. Because of the words religious intolerance in his mandate, he had come up against many problems in communicating with States, organizations and other groups which, when approached, thought they were suspected of intolerance. A change of title, which he had been proposing for three years, would thus give his mandate a more positive cast and take into account its legal reality. He welcomed the fact that the Commission on Human Rights had undertaken to discuss the issue at its subsequent session.

31. Responding to the representative of Finland, he said that no State or region had a monopoly on extremism; it existed everywhere and even continued to be on the increase. He had thus devoted particular attention to the problem, convinced that extremism was an insult to human intelligence and to the wisdom of God. Without doubt, it was necessary not only to fight against extremism, but also to prevent it, particularly through education, which should make it possible to change attitudes. However, education sometimes paved the way not only for extremism, but also for utter obscurantism and the denial of human rights. He recalled an idea that he had proposed to combat extremism, but which had not been taken up namely that States should agree on a minimum set of principles and rules of behaviour concerning extremism. States had not been asked to adopt a common philosophy or policy, but to respect certain basic principles, such as refusing to host extremists guilty of crimes of violence. He was honoured that the Commission on Human Rights had requested him to participate actively in preparations for the world conference on racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. The three phenomena of ethnic intolerance, racism and religious intolerance frequently converged. Indeed, in some countries, there was a direct link between religious beliefs, ethnic identity and also, occasionally, religious affiliation.

32. Replying to the representative of Myanmar, the Special Rapporteur said that he always took maximum precautions before publishing an allegation. It was then incumbent upon the State to make its observations. Moreover, discrimination could result from a widespread policy, a law or ordinary administrative procedures. It was to be hoped that Myanmar would be more cooperative in communicating its views to him.

33. **Ms. Faetanini** (San Marino) said that the report of the Special Rapporteur (A/54/386) dealt with substantive issues, namely ethical questions. The observations of the Special Rapporteur thus made it possible to eliminate ways of thinking which gave rise to intolerance and discrimination. He should provide more information on preventive action.

34. **Mr. Salinas** (Chile) said that, fortunately, his country was relatively free of such problems. As the Special Rapporteur had said, in many regions, numerous religious groups were often prevented from carrying out their social and humanitarian work. Thus, not only the right to freedom of religion, but also other fundamental rights, such as the right to development, were being threatened. He asked the Special Rapporteur to provide more information on that matter.

35. **Mr. Cherif** (Tunisia) asked the Special Rapporteur to explain his appeal stressing the need to give the special rapporteurs increased resources and greater independence so that they could better fulfil their mandates.

36. **Mr. Bhattarai** (Nepal) said that paragraph 27 of the report of the Special Rapporteur (A/54/386) distorted the incidents that had occurred in November 1998 in Rukume, western Nepal. In reality, the police, faced with demonstrators who were determined to commit acts of violence and terrorism and were on the point of attacking the security forces, had been obliged to open fire, killing two people. Nepal was a democratic, multi-ethnic and multilingual country that respected all religions, without discrimination. Furthermore, the police, who served the people, did not carry out executions. Lastly, the reference to the Bharatiya Janata Party, which was an Indian political party, in the context of Nepal was meaningless and provided an example of the lack of accuracy in the preparation of the report. His Government had already communicated its reply to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva and hoped that the Special Rapporteur would make the appropriate corrections to his final report.

37. **Mr. Amor** (Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the elimination of all forms of religious intolerance and of discrimination based on religion or belief), speaking in rely to the representative of San Marino, said that prevention should make it possible to change attitudes, particularly those of children. Several years previously, he had sent all States a questionnaire on the content of their primary and secondary school curricula and textbooks; 77 States had replied. In some cases, the content of those textbooks constituted a paean to hatred and intolerance. In many countries the national religion was presented as absolute truth, ignoring or ridiculing other religions. That simplistic, narrow-minded distinction between good and evil, between believers and non-believers and between God's people and the devil's, persisted. The Special Rapporteur had begun initiatives with the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and hoped that they would lead to the holding

of an international consultative conference on education in 2001. The second aspect of prevention was dialogue within and between religions. In cooperation with UNESCO, an international council on interreligious dialogue, composed of representatives of various religions, had been established. It was essential to bring an end to contempt and to ensure that respect and understanding prevailed, within and between religions, despite their differences.

38. In reply to the representative of Chile, he said that the obstacles encountered by groups engaged in social and humanitarian work were not new. He gave as an example the case of the Catholic Church, which had long played a major role in the field of the social and humanitarian work. However, because each religion claimed to possess the truth, that work could be accompanied by proselytism, which might constitute an infringement of the free will of others, particularly when carried out among the very poor. In reply to the representative of Tunisia, he said that there were cases of overlapping and lack of coordination between the mechanisms of the Commission on Human Rights and that some mandates had virtually no resources. For several years, he had been calling for the establishment of a legal and statistical data bank on all States as a means of monitoring the situation everywhere and ensuring justice for States, religious groups and victims. However, the honesty, objectivity and independence of the experts, who were often misunderstood, were essential. For example, a special rapporteur must endeavour to maintain the best possible relationship with States, while refusing to be associated with any body or to accept any post in any State whatsoever, including his own. In passing, he paid tribute to his own country, which had never hindered him in the exercise of his functions. That principle also applied to non-governmental organizations; a rapporteur or expert could not become a representative of a non-governmental organization or combine the post of director of such an organization with his functions as rapporteur. Special rapporteurs must also be independent of administrative structures, even that of the Office of the High Commissioner. The special rapporteurs had specific mandates, which they carried out with the help of the Office of the High Commissioner's logistical services, but that necessary relationship must not prevent them from maintaining their independence, since they were responsible only to the General Assembly or the Commission on Human Rights.

39. He took note of the statement made by the representative of Nepal and invited that country to be more cooperative. Accurate information had been communicated to the Nepalese authorities, and he hoped that they would comment thereon and reply to him.

40. **Mr. Šimonović** (Croatia) noted with satisfaction the work done by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and welcomed the conclusion of an agreement between his Government and the Office of the High Commissioner aimed at strengthening the protection and promotion of human rights in Croatia.

41. In line with the debate on humanitarian intervention that was challenging traditional notions of national sovereignty, there was increasing acceptance of the principle that human rights were universal and of the need for international cooperation in the field of human rights; States were accepting various forms of assistance, monitoring and field presence as a supplement to national mechanisms.

42. On the eve of the new millennium, it was extremely important to fight both isolationism and the misuse of human rights by establishing impartial, fair and objective procedures in that area.

43. His delegation believed, as the High Commissioner had pointed out in her report (A/54/36), that the international human rights treaties were the sources of universal, indivisible, interrelated and interdependent human rights norms and principles.

44. The Commission on Human Rights, the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly had established special procedures to deal with allegations of human rights violations. Her delegation supported the study undertaken by the Office of the High Commissioner to strengthen country special procedures and proposed that guidelines should be developed for the establishment and, when the time was right, the termination of such procedures or their replacement by United Nations treaty bodies or regional monitoring mechanisms. Good coordination among the United Nations monitoring bodies and the regional monitoring bodies was essential, especially for small countries.

45. Croatia's policy had always been one of complete openness to the various mechanisms for the protection and promotion of human rights. Since achieving independence, Croatia had become a party to the six United Nations human rights treaties, including the optional protocols to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

46. In response to the grave violations of human rights that had accompanied the aggression perpetrated against the Republic of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, a United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights had been appointed in 1992 and invited to make recommendations for bringing violations to an end and preventing future violations. Since then, three special

rapporteurs had been appointed, numerous reports had been issued and several resolutions adopted by the Commission on Human Rights and the General Assembly.

47. After cooperating fully with the special rapporteurs for almost eight years, his Government had yet to receive a comprehensive report evaluating the cooperation and the progress made, and the implementation of the Special Rapporteur's previous recommendations. Furthermore, his Government was still waiting for the Special Rapporteur to issue an overview of the situation of human rights since 1991, in accordance with paragraph 44 (c) of Commission on Human Rights resolution 1996/71.

48. Moreover, the report of the Special Rapporteur (A/54/396) did not indicate clearly that Croatia had accepted the six core United Nations treaties in the field of human rights. It did not mention the presence in Croatia since 1996 of a monitoring mission of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) or the fact that Croatia was a member of the Council of Europe and had ratified the European Convention on Human Rights in 1997. It was also regrettable that the report contained less information than the regional reports, such as those of the Council of Europe and OSCE, and that it contradicted them in certain cases. Furthermore, the return of the crisis in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia clearly demonstrated that the special rapporteurs had been unable to prevent human rights violations, contrary to what had been envisaged in 1992.

49. Croatia must still improve the protection of human rights in its territory and it was seeking the cooperation of the international community to that end. Currently, it needed to strengthen the implementation of internationally accepted standards. The dialogue with the United Nations treaty-monitoring bodies could lead to the strengthening of national mechanisms. The international community could also be involved through such projects as those implemented by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Council of Europe and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. Mention must also be made of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe aimed at bringing prosperity and stability to that part of Europe.

50. The peaceful reintegration of the eastern part of Croatia, which had previously been occupied, through joint action by the United Nations and the Croatian Government had been followed by the gradual return of displaced persons. His Government was implementing its return programme for all refugees and displaced persons, irrespective of ethnicity. In order to ensure that that complex process was successful, Croatia needed international aid for its efforts to rebuild, revitalize the economy and clear landmines.

51. Croatia, which was committed to strengthening the democratic process, was striving to consolidate the rule of law and to ensure respect for human rights. Conscious of the importance of education in that regard, it had launched a national programme of human rights education designed to contribute to the process of stabilization, place the protection of human rights in the foreground and emphasize the equality of all.

52. **Ms. Rubin** (United States of America),* reviewing the main issues of concern in the human rights field, said that in the Sudan, where nearly two million people, most of them innocent civilians, had perished during sixteen years of civil war, the Government was impeding the delivery of emergency humanitarian aid in the south of the country and continued to support a Ugandan rebel group responsible for the forced enlistment and murder of thousands of Ugandan children. Given that there continued to be regular reports of slavery in Sudan, it was imperative that the Sudanese Government should use its authority to put an end to it. Finally, religious freedom was not respected. Christians and animists continued to be persecuted, there were reports of forced conversions in the army, and Christian leaders were arrested on spurious charges. Since the human rights situation in the Sudan was unlikely to improve so long as the civil war continued, the United States urged the parties involved to negotiate within the framework of the talks held under the auspices of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development.

53. In Nigeria, by contrast, the human rights situation had improved markedly over the past sixteen months thanks to the efforts of the transitional Government and, subsequently, the administration of President Obasanjo. In addition to clemency measures taken in respect of political prisoners and exiles, the holding of four rounds of elections had helped to return the country to the path of democracy, while the independent press had continued to play a vibrant role in civil society. Finally, although the Nigerian Government was to be applauded for its commitment to rooting out corruption, it had yet to rescind all the repressive instruments that remained in force, including the decree authorizing the authorities to arrest and detain persons without trial or access to legal counsel.

* The remainder of the statement by the United States representative was circulated at the meeting as an informal document.

54. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, journalists, staff of non-governmental organizations and opposition figures continued to be the targets of intimidation. Since the signing of the Lusaka accords in the summer of 1999, nothing had really been done to ensure security and broaden political participation in the country, and human rights abuses continued throughout the territory, both in the regions controlled by the Government and in the areas held by the rebels.

55. In Burundi, numerous civilians had died during the recent rebel attacks and reprisals by government forces. Both sides were urged to refrain from any act that would cause innocent people to suffer.

56. In Iran, despite some progress, the human rights record left much to be desired. Abuses of those rights were numerous, including extrajudicial or arbitrary executions, widespread use of torture and other degrading treatment, harsh prison conditions, arbitrary arrests and detentions, lack of due process, and restrictions on freedom of expression, association, religion and movement. Certain elements within the Government had resorted to violence to thwart the aspiration of a large portion of the population to greater justice and freedom. Ethnic and religious minorities, such as the Baha'is, were suffering increasing repression, women faced legal and social discrimination and vigilante groups were resorting to violence and intimidation in order to impose their vision of society.

57. In Iraq, freedom of speech, assembly and religion continued to be denied to Iraqis, who were prevented from exercising their political rights. Power continued to be monopolized by Saddam Hussein and his relatives and close friends. State control was maintained through a reign of terror. People had been executed merely because of their association with an opposition group. The country's prisons were overcrowded, with some holding as many as five times their designated capacity. The Shi'ite majority continued to be persecuted and the authorities had apparently stepped up their repression in the south of the country. The army had arrested and executed thousands of Shi'ites in 1999 and had desecrated Shi'ite mosques and holy sites. In the province of Amara, the army had caused grave environmental damage and had indiscriminately targeted civilians in order to put an end to guerrilla activities.

58. Human rights monitors and other observers were restricted from investigating abuses and the Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Iraq had been denied entry into Iraq for seven years. International relief personnel were regularly harassed and intimidated by the Government and its security forces, and rewards had been offered for killing them. The facts spoke for themselves. Iraq remained on the agenda of the General Assembly, the international community remained united in acknowledging the need for a Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iraq, while Iraq was still unwilling to engage in a constructive dialogue with the United Nations bodies for the protection and promotion of human rights. Whatever the representative of Iraq said in the Committee was irrelevant; it is what Iraq did in the region that counted.

59. In Afghanistan, the Taliban's offensive in the summer of 1999 against the opposition forces had driven tens of thousands of people from their homes and caused hundreds of civilian casualties. According to the United Nations rapporteur on the human rights situation in Afghanistan, the Afghan people had become hostages, while externally armed forces sought to rule Afghanistan without the effective participation or consent of its people. Her delegation called for the respect of the rights of non-combatants, for the release of non-combatants in detention and for a full investigation of reported mass killings.

60. In Burma, the people continued to live under a highly repressive military regime that had intensified its restrictions on basic rights such as freedom of speech and freedom of association. Although the National League of Democracy was now legally recognized as an opposition party, it was frequently prevented from conducting normal activities and, since 1998, many members of that party had been arrested or been threatened; such was the case of Aung San Suu Kyi, the party's General Secretary, whose activities were severely constrained. However, there had been one positive development in 1999 in that the Government had permitted the International Committee of the Red Cross access to prisons and had implemented some of the ICRC recommendations.

61. The human rights situation in China had deteriorated since 1998. The Government had continued the crackdown on the opposition movement that had begun in late 1998. National and regional leaders of the China Democracy Party had received harsh sentences for exercising their internationally recognized right to freedom of expression, speech and assembly. The crackdown on the Falun Gong and its practitioners was also of concern and appeared to be unwarranted, since the movement appeared to be a peaceful, non-political and spiritual one. The restrictions imposed on religious practice and manifestations of belief in China, including Tibet, were deeply troubling. Her Government had called upon China to relax or eliminate registration requirements for religious groups and to allow all groups to freely manifest their beliefs. While China had undertaken reforms of criminal law procedures, the fact still remained

that political and religious prisoners did not have the same protection as ordinary Chinese, and that due process was ignored in political cases. The human rights situation in areas where there were concentrations of minority groups, such as Tibet and Xinjiang, was of particular concern.

62. The devastation to East Timor's towns and villages as a result of the militia's scorched earth policy was overwhelming.

63. The Government of Cuba continued to repress the fundamental freedoms of its citizens, including the right to freedom of speech, assembly, religion and to change their Government peacefully.

64. **Mr. Ka** (Senegal) said that his delegation welcomed the quality of the report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (A/54/36) which addressed important issues, including obstacles faced by developing countries which had to face major economic and social challenges. Having taken note of the different reports on the human rights situations in a number of countries, he wished to reiterate his country's commitment to the principles of objectivity and impartiality in the assessment of the human rights situation in Member States. Such rights were universal and indivisible. Since his delegation gave equal importance to the respect for civil and political rights, as well as for economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development, it could only hope that the disparities in the degree of priority accorded to political rights over economic and social rights would gradually be reduced.

65. His delegation was pleased to note that the High Commissioner had underscored in her report the indivisible nature of human rights and the need to promote fruitful cooperation between human rights programmes and bodies and bodies dealing with operational activities for development. Senegal therefore encouraged the Office of the High Commissioner and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to further develop and continue their cooperation in the spirit of the memorandum of understanding signed in March 1998. Moreover, poverty eradication was an ethical, moral, social, political and economic imperative.

66. It must be acknowledged that many political crises on the African continent were often the result of the lack of vigorous policies for the protection and promotion of human rights, and that such crises often came in the wake of massive and repeated violations of fundamental rights. Therefore, the process of democratization, consolidation of the rule of law and promotion of the independence of the judiciary should be pursued and intensified. Particular emphasis should be put on the strengthening of national institutions for the protection of human rights. Senegal had established, in conformity with General Assembly resolution 48/632, a human rights committee which submitted a report on the situation of human rights in Senegal every year.

67. Since education was particularly crucial to combating political and religious intolerance and racial hatred and discrimination, his Government had introduced modules on human rights and international humanitarian law into teaching programmes, including in police and army schools.

68. Senegal had ratified almost all the international legal instruments on human rights and was one of 13 countries that had ratified the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Their Families. It had ratified the Additional Protocol of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the establishment of the African Court of Human Rights, adopted by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1998. Senegal was the first country to ratify the Statute of the International Criminal Court.

69. The task of the interministerial committee on human rights and humanitarian law, which was established in 1996, was to see to it that Senegal complied with its obligations with respect to the protection, defence and promotion of human rights. In his country, which was a genuine democracy, an independent body supervised the organization of local and national elections. An independent mediator appointed by the President of the Republic had just submitted his report on the situation of opposition parties and the financing of political parties.

70. His delegation was in favour of establishing early warning mechanisms for massive human rights violations, irrespective of where they occurred. It welcomed the adoption, at the fifty-third session of the General Assembly, of the Declaration on the Rights and Responsibilities of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

71. In her report (A/54/36), the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights had rightly pointed out that the fact that men and women continued to demand respect for their fundamental rights was a driving force for the future. Human rights had become not only one of the major concerns of international politics, but also an essential criterion of the success of government action. As such, they must be translated into concrete action in everyday politics.

72. **Mr. Yamazaki** (Japan) noted that, while individual States had the primary responsibility for guaranteeing human rights, the promotion and protection of those rights was a

legitimate concern of the international community, regardless of culture, tradition, political and economic system or stage of development. Dialogue, cooperation and the clear expression of views were practical approaches to that task and their purpose should not be to level accusations.

73. He noted with satisfaction that, since the Consultative Group Meeting for Cambodia in February 1999, positive changes had been taking place in that country, as reflected in the amendment to article 51 of the Civil Servants Act, the proclamation concerning the administration of prisons and prison procedures and the five-year national plan against child sexual exploitation. Japan would continue to help those efforts by Cambodia and invited other members of the international community to provide similar assistants. It also believed that the Khmer Rouge leaders must be brought to account in accordance with international standards of justice, fairness and due process of law. It therefore strongly hoped that the Government of Cambodia and the United Nations would reach agreement on a mechanism which fulfilled those criteria.

74. Japan welcomed the agreement between the Government of Myanmar and the International Committee of the Red Cross, which had led to visits by the latter to places of detention in Myanmar; it sincerely hoped that such cooperation would continue. It had also been pleased to learn that the Government of Myanmar had engaged in a dialogue with the Chairman of Australia's National Human Rights Commission and with the European Union fact-finding mission. It attached great importance to the dialogue between the Government of Myanmar and the National League for Democracy and therefore appealed to both sides to make every effort to improve the current situation.

75. The human rights violations in East Timor, reported by the United Nations Mission in East Timor (UNAMET) and other sources, were matters of grave concern. He hoped that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Indonesian Government would cooperate in advancing the investigation into the violations, with a view to bringing those responsible to account.

76. Recognizing the importance of dialogue and the formation of partnerships on human rights in the region, his Government continued to host the symposium on human rights in the Asia-Pacific region. Trafficking in persons was to be the main theme of the fourth such symposium, to be held in January 2000, which would be preceded by an inter-sessional workshop for the promotion and protection of human rights in the Asia-Pacific region, organized in cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and focusing on human rights education.

77. He hoped that at the current session of the General Assembly there would be fruitful discussions on the right to development that would contribute to the success of the efforts of the open-ended working group on the right of development at its December 1999 meeting in Geneva. Summarizing his country's position on that issue, he said that the subject of the right to development was the human person and not the individual State; that right should not be confused with the right to economic assistance; the realization of the right to development demanded greater cooperation between developed and developing countries, as well as a step-by-step approach in which the rule of law, good governance and basic human needs were prioritized; and the involvement of economic experts was important.

78. As in the past, Japan would continue to be a strong supporter of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. It trusted that the current vacancies in management-level posts would be filled without delay and that the Office would be managed in accordance with the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity, with respect for the principle of impartiality.

79. **Mr. Palouš** (Czech Republic) said that, 10 years after the "Velvet Revolution" which had been welcomed as a major victory in the struggle for democracy and respect for human rights, his country's troubles still were not over.

80. In a recently issued human rights memorandum, the Czech Ministry for Foreign Affairs had stated that the promotion and protection of human rights was a basic principle and thus a main priority of Czech foreign policy. Realizing that human rights violations were the concern of the whole international community, his Government was actively engaged in an open and constructive dialogue on human rights in various international forums and institutions and understood the importance of effective cooperation with the world community of democratic nations, characterized by tolerance and mutual respect.

81. While defending the principle of the indivisibility of human rights, his Government appreciated the importance of a proper balance between civil, social and economic rights and was aware that an initiative critical of the human rights situation in any part of the world would bear fruit only if there was a true political dialogue. It did not, therefore, actively promote economic sanctions as a means of putting pressure on Governments which violated certain human rights principles.

82. His country was well aware that the problem of its Roma minority was still unresolved. Having been criticized on that score on a number of occasions, his Government wished to emphasize that it had not been inactive and that it willingly recognized that quite a lot remained to be done. He noted that the Roma community faced various obstacles in most European countries where it was established.

83. His Government's programmes and strategies emphasized cooperation and communication, in the belief that the Roma problem could be solved if there was mutual understanding and goodwill on the part of both the majority population and the Roma community. To that end, it invited constructive criticism aimed at mobilizing the country's forces and opening a space for dialogue and cooperation.

84. **Mr. Chowdhury** (Bangladesh), emphasizing the indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights, recalled that the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, in her statement to the Committee, had highlighted the lack of emphasis on economic, social and cultural rights as opposed to civil and political rights. Equal emphasis should be placed on both categories of rights, since widespread poverty and failure to meet people's development aspirations stifled political development and weakened democracy. The right to development was an overarching right, the achievement of which was dependent on the fulfilment of civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights and also essential to their promotion. In 1993, the international community had recognized the right to development as a universal and inalienable right and had stressed the promotion of effective international cooperation with a view to achieving it. He was pleased to note that the right to development had been placed high on the agenda of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. He believed that, in future reports, that right should be dealt with in a separate section. While his delegation welcomed the efforts of the High Commissioner to integrate human rights references into the Common Country Assessment and into the guidelines of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework, it would like to see more transparency and to stress that the establishment of national indicators should not overshadow the important international aspect of the full realization of the right to development nor serve as a means of introducing conditionality in terms of multilateral assistance to developing countries. Noting that the independent expert had stated in his interim report (E/CN.4/1999/WG.18/2) that the right to development was still evolving, his delegation believed that the logical conclusion of such evolution would be an international convention on the right to development and that an evaluation should be made as to the viability and relevance of drafting such a convention.

85. Believing that effective and independent national mechanisms were the best safeguard against human rights violations, his Government was in the final stages of setting up a national human rights commission and appointing an Ombudsperson through parliamentary approval. In 1998 Bangladesh had become a party to six international human rights instruments, and in September 1999 it had signed the Statute of the International Criminal Court.

86. States must work together nationally and internationally to eliminate impunity for human rights violations, regardless of who the perpetrators might be. In that regard, the priority of the international community should be to support Governments in building national capacities to prevent such violations.

87. Human rights education was an important means to that end. Bangladesh was currently updating curricula and preparing teaching materials for the introduction of peace and human rights education in primary and secondary schools and hoped that it would receive international support for such efforts, particularly in the form of technical assistance.

88. **Mr. Rahmtalla** (Sudan) said that his country was fully convinced of the universality and indivisibility of human rights and believed that the international community had a legitimate mandate to evaluate the human rights situation throughout the world. His Government had undertaken to establish the rule of law under a democratic system open to all citizens, especially since the adoption of a new constitution in 1998, which had been followed by a series of practical measures concerning, *inter alia*, the formation of political parties, of which there were now 33. In terms of cooperation with human rights bodies, in 1999 the Sudan had received the visits of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Sudan, the Special Rapporteur on the elimination of all forms of religious intolerance, the United Nations humanitarian assessment mission to the Nuba Mountains, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights needs assessment mission and the Secretary-General's Special Representative on the protection of children affected by armed conflict. The Sudan was also cooperating with regional human rights bodies, in particular the African Commission on Human Rights. In parallel with those activities in the area of the protection of human rights, the Government had been seeking a peaceful solution to the problem of southern Sudan. It had declared a general cessation of hostilities in anticipation of a definitive ceasefire, recognized the right of self-

determination of the southern region and accepted that rights and duties derived from citizenship, without discrimination on religious or ethnic grounds. The rebel movement was thus solely responsible for the continuation of the conflict in southern Sudan and for the resulting human rights violations, of which the primary victims were women and children. His Government again called upon the international community to put pressure on the rebel movement to agree to a peaceful settlement of the conflict.

89. It was regrettable that certain countries which had decided to take upon themselves the task of defending human rights worldwide, through specialized organizations and associations, were violating human rights norms and instruments by committing outrageous acts, such as the destruction by the United States of a Sudanese pharmaceutical plant on 20 August 1998. The destruction of the plant was depriving the Sudanese people of their basic right to health and development. That violation was in addition to the unilateral economic sanctions imposed on the Sudan by the United States. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action emphasized that all human rights were indivisible and interrelated, including the right to development, which must receive all due attention from the international community in the context of respect for international commitments and cooperation. The resolutions of the World Conference on Human Rights, emphasized that food aid and economic measures should not be used as a political tool, as some countries had done. Unilateral economic sanctions had severely undermined human rights in many developing countries, including the Sudan. It was time to put an end to selectivity and partiality and to the politicization of the issue of human rights.

90. His delegation was one of those that had rejected the draft resolution submitted by the European Union on the question of the death penalty (A/C.3/54/L.8). There was still no international consensus on the question of capital punishment. Moreover, the promulgation of laws was a sovereign prerogative of States and brooked no interference. The cultural and religious diversity of countries should be respected in order to reinforce the culture of understanding and peace which was the primary mission of the United Nations. No country in the world could be said to be free of violations or excesses in the area of human rights. Each country should therefore devote its efforts to ensuring that its own citizens were able effectively to enjoy their fundamental rights and freedoms.

91. His delegation had been surprised to hear the United States representative cite a number of countries in which human rights violations were occurring, without mentioning her own. It reserved the right to reply to the malicious allegations made by the United States delegation.

92. **Mr. Powles** (New Zealand) said that, in an increasingly interdependent world, the universality and indivisibility of human rights were more evident than ever. In 1999, armed conflicts had again placed a heavy burden on the United Nations system, and the High Commissioner for Human Rights was to be commended for having responded quickly to the emerging humanitarian crises.

93. Those responsible for human rights abuses in East Timor must be brought to justice and all concerned must cooperate fully with the Secretary-General's international commission of inquiry. Safe, unrestricted access for international agencies and protection for both refugees and those rendering assistance must be provided. The right of refugees to return freely to East Timor must be upheld and his delegation welcomed the assurances given by the Government of Indonesia in that regard.

94. His delegation remained deeply concerned about massive human rights violations in Kosovo, the displacement of most of the civilian population and the destruction of much of the province's housing and infrastructure. While it was true that the refugees were returning to Kosovo and housing and services were being rehabilitated, the continuing acts of aggression against Serb and other minorities in the province were a reminder that the cycle of ethnic violence had still to be broken. The perpetrators of human rights violations must be brought to account, and his delegation strongly supported the work of the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia.

95. His delegation commended the work of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. New Zealand had contributed to the efforts of humanitarian agencies to bring relief to the thousands of refugees at risk in the Great Lakes region of Africa, where armed conflict and human rights violations continued.

96. His delegation regretted that there had been no improvement in the human rights situation in Myanmar: serious violations of human rights continued to occur, members of opposition groups continued to be harassed and arbitrarily detained, and significant numbers of people, particularly members of ethnic minorities, had been forcibly displaced and subjected to forced labour for economic projects and military operations. Restrictions on freedoms of association and expression also remained commonplace. Progress would be impossible until the Government engaged in a genuine political dialogue with the opposition, respected fundamental political freedoms, made progress on constitutional reform and moved towards the holding of free

elections. His delegation therefore welcomed the visit to Myanmar by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in October 1999.

97. His delegation welcomed the holding of broadly representative elections in Cambodia in July 1998, which had resulted in the formation of a new Government. With regard to the prosecution of Khmer Rouge responsible for human rights violations, it understood and applauded the Cambodian authorities' desire to pursue reconciliation as well as accountability, and urged them to move quickly to establish a tribunal for that purpose, in line with United Nations recommendations.

98. While welcoming the growing role of the Islamic Republic of Iran in regional human rights initiatives, his delegation remained concerned about the treatment of certain religious minorities in that country and urged the Government to ensure full respect for their rights.

99. His delegation deplored the fact that Iraq was continuing to refuse access to the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights and to ignore requests by United Nations agencies for the admission of human rights monitors. There was evidence that systematic human rights violations continued in Iraq, including the killing of political detainees, deaths of prisoners and the forced removal of thousands of minority Kurds. His delegation welcomed the expansion of the United Nations "oil-for-food" programme, but shared the frustration of the Special Rapporteur at the Government's lack of cooperation in the implementation of that humanitarian programme and urged Iraq to comply fully with its responsibilities, for the benefit of the Iraqi people.

100. His delegation noted with concern that the human rights situation in Afghanistan continued to deteriorate. Afghan citizens continued to be deprived of basic rights and freedoms and killings, disappearances, torture and arbitrary imprisonment persisted. His delegation urged the warring factions to move towards a peaceful resolution of their conflict in order to end such violations. In particular, it deplored the treatment suffered by women and girls.

101. His delegation acknowledged the steps taken by China towards ratification of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and encouraged China's continuing participation in substantive dialogue with the international community on human rights issues. However, it remained concerned about continued reports of violations of international human rights standards, including freedom of association and freedom of expression.

102. His delegation was a sponsor of the draft resolution calling for a moratorium on the use of the death penalty, which it considered to be a violation of the most fundamental human rights. It was particularly concerned about the application of the death penalty in disregard of accepted international standards and without due process, for instance, the execution of individuals for crimes committed as juveniles or while lacking full mental capacity. It also reminded those countries which continued to use the death penalty of their obligations under the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations.

103. The recent appeal by the High Commissioner for Human Rights for additional funding for the treaty bodies and human rights mechanisms had brought funding issues into relief. Adequate resources were important for the effective operation of the treaty bodies, and sufficient funding for that purpose needed to be provided for in the regular budget. There was also a need to strengthen the responsiveness and effectiveness of the human rights mechanisms. To that end, his delegation welcomed the establishment of an open-ended working group under the Commission on Human Rights.

104. His delegation welcomed the continuing development of national human rights institutions around the world and the growth of regional human rights arrangements and was gratified at the results of the fourth annual meeting of the Asia-Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions, held in Manila in September 1999.

105. His Government would continue to contribute as actively as possible to efforts to ensure the global acceptance of human rights standards, the translation of that acceptance into legal protection and the upholding of that legal protection by States.

106. **Mr. Alemán** (Ecuador) said that his country respected the principles that underpinned the legal structure of international organizations and its own constitutional system. All the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations had been incorporated into the domestic legislation of Ecuador, which had always preserved and upheld those principles in its international action and would continue to do so unreservedly. Two of those principles, self-determination of peoples and promotion of respect for human rights, were particularly noteworthy. For an independent State, self-determination meant a people's ability to adopt the economic and political system of its choosing. For a Non-Self-Governing Territory, it meant the right to independence and to its own government, a right which the administering Power had an obligation to put into effect in cooperation with the United Nations. With regard

to the promotion of respect for human rights, it should be recalled that the Charter of the United Nations referred to the question of human rights in its Preamble and in Articles 1, 13, 55 and 62. A society existed only by virtue of its people, and every State or group of States must guarantee respect for the human person and for his or her fundamental rights and effectively promote those rights. In ratifying the Charter of the United Nations, a State agreed to limit its action by voluntarily placing itself under international jurisdiction in all matters covered by that instrument. As a result, when South Africa had claimed that its apartheid policy was an internal matter governed solely by the laws of a sovereign State, the international community had overwhelmingly rejected that interpretation because in signing the Charter, South Africa had undertaken to respect and promote fundamental rights for all without distinction. The international community had also rejected the attempts of dictators and autocrats to invoke arguments of sovereignty to justify the most egregious violations of human rights.

107. It thus followed that the Charter imposed on its signatories the obligation to promote universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Collective concern for the protection of human rights was not only allowed but justified by the fact that the human person had become the primary subject of international law. In that regard, his Government wished to reiterate its support for the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by the General Assembly in 1998.

108. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action rested on three essential pillars: the Charter of the United Nations, international human rights instruments and international law. His country, in addition to ratifying the main international and regional instruments relating to human rights, had accepted the jurisdiction of the tribunals established in accordance with those instruments. Any citizen of Ecuador who perceived an infringement of their rights could appeal to those bodies. In the context of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, his country had always been a staunch defender of human rights and had never shrunk from recognizing its responsibility in the isolated cases of violations which had occurred in its territory.

109. His delegation wished to reiterate its concern at the reservations made to several international conventions (especially those relating to children's rights, the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination and discrimination against women), which distorted their content and limited their application.

110. The World Conference on Human Rights had requested States to report on the progress accomplished in implementing the Vienna Programme of Action. As noted by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Ecuadorian Government was working in close connection with the Office of the High Commissioner to organize a meeting on the promotion and protection of human rights in Latin America and the Caribbean, which would take place in Quito from 29 November to 1 December 1999, and which should identify the five main pillars of a regional strategy, establish a regional framework for cooperation and indicate how to implement measures at the regional, subregional and national levels. On the internal level, his Government was seeking the means to implement effectively its action plan for human rights.

111. With regard to the organization of the work of the Third Committee, his delegation emphasized the need to find effective means to guarantee the publication in a timely manner of reports on human rights. However useful their dissemination on the Internet might be, it should not replace their distribution in all the official languages of the United Nations.

112. In conclusion, he quoted a passage from the Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano emphasizing that, although the United Nations had proclaimed long lists of fundamental rights between 1948 and 1976, the vast majority of humankind had only the right to see, hear and be silent. In order to catch a glimpse of another possible world, one could begin to exercise a right that had never been declared, namely the right to dream, for the world was also made of dreams that could come true. The United Nations, if people so wished, could be an effective and cooperative means of ensuring peace, development and respect for human rights. It should remain a forum for seeking solutions to the serious problems affecting humankind with representatives of different cultures who, beyond those differences, should be united by the common aim of fully realizing the goals and principles contained in the Charter of the United Nations, which was a kind of universal constitution.

113. **Ms. Mbugua** (United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)), speaking on behalf of Dr. Sadik, the Executive Director of the Fund, said that the Declaration and the Programme of Action adopted at the World Conference on Human Rights held at Vienna in 1993 had stressed the universality and indivisibility of human rights; confirmed that women's rights were an integral part of those rights; emphasized the importance of a human rights-based approach to population and development; highlighted that such an approach must focus on meeting the needs and rights of individuals rather than on meeting demographic targets

alone; and recognized that reproductive rights were an essential component of a rights-based approach given the close links between a woman's reproductive health and the way she was valued in society.

114. The review of the five-year implementation of the Programme of Action adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development, held at Cairo in 1994, had shown that progress had been made in many areas. Reproductive rights were now internationally recognized as crucial both to advancing women's human rights and to promoting development, and Governments and civil society organizations had in recent years advanced those rights to an unprecedented degree. Five years after the Conference, it had been possible to measure the extent to which that human rights-based approach had been integrated into population and development programmes. Practices such as female genital mutilation had been outlawed in many African countries, adolescent reproductive health was receiving more attention, poor rural women were being given greater access to reproductive health services, and efforts to address the vulnerability of women and girls to the AIDS epidemic had been stepped up in many developing countries.

115. However, in many other areas critical to the Vienna and Cairo Programmes of Action, progress to date was still slow. Women and girls continued to suffer systematic and wide-scale violations of their most basic human rights, in particular those rights related to their sexuality and reproductive health. Nearly one third of all women of reproductive age did not have access to family planning and acceptable contraceptive methods. Half a million women died every year as a result of pregnancy. Almost half of all women would be victims of violence and in many countries, violence against women was not sanctioned by law. The review of the results of the Cairo Conference had shown that women and girls in developing countries were still in need of basic reproductive health information and services and of protection from violations of their fundamental human rights.

116. UNFPA had supported national partners in taking action to enable women and girls to effectively exercise their rights. As agreed in Vienna, the reproductive roles of women and girls should not continue to be a major cause of discrimination against them. To that end, UNFPA continued its unrelenting efforts to eliminate violence and discrimination against women and girls through efforts at the international, regional and national levels, which included advocating the integration of women's reproductive rights in the mandate of all human rights treaty bodies and strengthening collaboration with them; strengthening policies and the legal frameworks to protect and promote women's and girls' reproductive rights; supporting partnerships to monitor violations of those rights within the context of existing international instruments; advancing safe motherhood; promoting the human rights approach to conceptualize gender-based violence; implementing initiatives to meet the reproductive health needs of women and girls in emergency and post-conflict situations; offering services and information to address the reproductive health needs of the young generation; and protecting the rights of older women, in particular widows.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.